Unveiled

A VIDEO INSTALLATION BY THOM VANDER BEKEN In Western Europe, which has in fact become a receiver of immi-grants although it did not see itself in that role, some people still find it difficult to apprehend their identity in terms of any other culture but their own.

> Amin Maalouf – In the Name of Identity

It seems that only our past truely belongs to us: the Flemish Primitives, Breugel, Rubens, Van Dyck, the belfries and beguinages, that is the ,real' Flanders.

> – Erik Hertog Flemish Identity, Myth and Reality

THE FLEMISH PRIMITIVES ARE REDISCOVERED IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY AND THE NEWLY FOUNDED BEL-GIAN STATE (1830) QUICKLY CLAIMS THEIR FAME. VAN EYCK, VAN DER WEYDEN AND OTHERS SHOW THAT A SMALL COUNTRY IS CAPABLE OF GREAT ARTISTIC ACHIEVEMENTS. THE PRIMITIVES – TRUE TO THE ROMAN-TIC TRADITION – BECOME PART OF A COMMON, BELGIAN, NATIONAL IDENTITY.

TODAY, THE WESTERN WORLD IS UNDERGOING PRO-FOUND CHANGES. THE INFLUX OF IMMIGRANTS COMPELS US TO QUESTION THE EXISTING CONCEPT OF IDENTITY. SHOULD WE STICK TO A STRICT DEFINITION OR BREAK IT OPEN? PERHAPS THESE FIVE HUNDRED YEAR OLD PAIN-TINGS ARE OF USE AGAIN IN THE RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD OF TODAY.

Early Netherlandish painting refers to the work of artists, also known as the **Flemish Primitives**, active in the Low Countries during the 15th and 16th century. The major artists of this period include Rogier Van der Weyden, Jan Van Eyck, Hans Memling, Dirk Bouts and Hugo van der Goes. During this period, the modern national borders of France, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands did not exist.

A number of the artists traditionally associated with the movement had linguistic origins that were neither Flemish nor Dutch. Van der Weyden was born in Tournai, and Robert Campin in Valenciennes (present-day France), Hans Memling was born in Seligenstadt, near Frankfurt in Germany, and Dirk Bouts was a native of Haarlem (The Netherlands). Even the Van Eyck brothers were born on the edge, namely in Maaseik.

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IT'S SPRING 2010.

In the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin, I'm admiring Portrait of a Young Woman by Rogier Van der Weyden. It is a painting which intrigues in all its simplicity. The woman wears a white scarf gracefully draped around her head, and her hands rest peacefully on top of one other. Nothing else, and yet so strong. She looks you straight in the eye and her gaze will not let you go.

While I'm in Berlin, the veil debate is raging in full force in Belgium. The discussion is situated within a broader debate on identity that is high on the agenda everywhere else in Europe. It comes at a time when more and more voices would have us believe that multicultural society has failed. Two generations after migration started the melting pot is still not working. Together with the knowledge that the newcomers will stay, fear has slipped into our minds. Fear for the loss of our identity. But what does that identity stand for?

Thinking about the painting in Berlin, I ask myself the question: what would happen if I replaced the veiled women of Rogier Van der Weyden by (veiled) Muslim women of today? That was the beginning of Unveiled.

Ethnicity, religion and skin colour have become dividing factors. We tend to forget what we have in common: emotions. According to art historians Rogier Van der Weyden is the man who introduced human emotion into Western art. He shows real people with real feelings. His portraits of women are especially moving. The fact that most of Rogier's women wear a headscarf, (apparently) doesn't keep us from admiring these paintings.

For a year and a half, I have worked together with twelve (veiled) Muslim women. The paintings of Rogier Van der Weyden were the object of our attention. The Muslim women took the place of Rogier's women in an effort to bring two divided worlds together. The confrontation within the same image is intended to raise questions and encourage debate. What makes us who we really are?

That is what Unveiled is about.



THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS (1440-1445) KMSK Antwerp © Lukas Art in Flanders vzw | Hugo Maertens



© Thom Vander Beken

VAN DER WEYDEN

Little is known about the life of Rogier Van der Weyden. Although his private life was generally uneventful, he was highly successful in his career and internationally famous. His surviving works consist mainly of religious triptychs, altarpieces and commissioned single and diptych portraits. His paintings were exported - or taken - to Italy and Spain, and by the latter half of the 15th century, he had eclipsed Jan Van Eyck in popularity. Rogier Van der Weyden died in 1464 and lies buried in the St. Catherine's Chapel of the Cathedral of Saint-Michael and Saint-Gudula in Brussels.

The Arab Spring starts in Tunisia. In the following months, 5 pictures from demonst-7 3 MAY rations and protests in STARTING JUNE 2010 the Arab World engulf 11 **MARCH 2010** 2010 the internet. Some 1 13 MAY I select paintings by remind me of paintings SEPTEMBER -AUGUST 2011 Together with my Rogier Van der Weyden In the summer of by Rogier Van der **DECEMBER 2009** 2010 I make the first 2011 search for women who with interesting poses Weyden. The parallels want to participate in for women. Sometimes, preliminary pictures convince me that the During several workthey are shown alone, shops the women get The museum M in Unveiled, I also begin with Bouchra. Initially, emotions expressed The women observe 15 to know each other Leuven (B) hosts a my journey to all the sometimes in groups I allow her to freely in his paintings are Ramadan and nothing DECEMBER of two or more. I paint better. Patricia. a large Rogier Van der major European art interpret Rogier's universal. They are not much happens for the on photocopies of the Lebanese actress museums. I want to try compositions. In the limited to the West 2011 Weyden exhibition. whole month of August. teaches them how to It's my first introducto see as many original paintings to get an idea end, I will decide to or to the religious Only in September will tion to the work of Van der Weyden painwhat my pictures could copy them as closely as context in which they show their emotions we continue with the Unveiled premières at tings as possible. eventually look like. possible. in front of the camera. last shoot for Unveiled. Daarkom in Brussels. the painter. originated. FEBRUARY STARTING MAY NOVEMBER MAY JUNE NOVEMBER 2010 **APRIL 2010** 2010 2010 2011 2011 2011 In the Gemäldegalerie I keep a notebook in Most of my models I organize a second test One of the finest The first real shoot for Together with Xavier in Berlin I admire which I collect mu have never seen a painshoot with Boushra and paintings by Van der Unveiled. The first day I edit Unveiled. From Portrait of a Young discoveries in muse-Büsra. The former has a Weyden used to look ting by Rogier or any is pretty stressful. 36 individual photo-Woman Unweiled is graphs a story comes ums. It is a journey of the other Flemish Moroccan background. completely different. 12 Primitives. They have the latter. Turkish. Now. Maru Magdalene alive. Once the editing born! through history of is finished Simon can Early Netherlandish difficulties 'reading' Together we look for a is reading her book Because of the intipainting. the original paintings. way to translate Van in a nice interior. but add his music. macy of the portrait it I ask two friends to der Weyden's paintings until a restoration in is sometimes claimed 4 14 1956 everything around pose as an example. for today. to be a portrait of her was painted black It helps! 8 Rogier's wife, Elisabeth This brings me to the 6 Goffaert. idea to use black for 2 the background of my pictures too.

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STARTING DECEMBER 2010



Unveiled

A VIDEO LOOP INSTALLATION BY THOM VANDER BEKEN.

Unveiled consists of 36 pictures, each of them referring to a different painting by Rogier Van der Weyden.

CREW

Thom Vander Beken, Tom De Visscher (DOP), Xavier Pique (editing), Patricia Barakat (coaching), Stéphanie Carlier (make-up), Simon Halsberghe (music)

MODELS

Bouchra, Büsra, Fatima, Fatima, Fatima, Banu en Esra, Aïcha, Bilal, Malika, Nadia, Hélène, Loubna en Dalil

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Jan Grygoriew, Berlin | www.jangry.com

MERCI

Roos, Malaika, Sabine (Daarkom), Joachim (de Pianofabriek), Hilde and Annelies, Tine, Mikael, Graham, Fatma, Samira, Sahila, Saïda, Emilie, Zohra, Malika Saissi and Lea David (de Vaartkapoen), Frederik Vandewiele, Wendy Schelfaut, Lorne Campbell, Evelyne Hinque (legal advice), De wereld van Kina (skulls), Nico van Hout, Vik Leyten, Madeleine Ter Kuile (KMSK Antwerp)

DEDICATED TO LILY MAHY





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